

ARTHUR ATKINS

HIS LETTERS: WITH NOTES
·VPON·PAINTING·



·MDCCCVIII·

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from

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ARTHUR : ATKIN

EXTRACTS FROM THE LETTERS
WITH NOTES ON PAINTING AND
LANDSCAPE : WRITTEN DURING
THE PERIOD OF HIS WORK AS A PAINTER IN
THE LAST TWO YEARS OF HIS LIFE

1896 : 1898

A. M. ROBERTSON : SAN FRANCISCO : CALIFORNIA

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December 1908

Printed by
The Stanley-Taylor Company
San Francisco

THE LETTERS OF ARTHUR ATKINS

ARTHUR ATKINS

1873-1899

For the friends of Arthur Atkins, these extracts from his letters, from the notes written upon the margins of his sketches, will have a real and touching value. They will recall for them, his talk, his interests, the lovely charm of the serious and noble friend they knew. For those to whom he was unknown, the pages may reveal something of the sensitive mind and heart of the artist: his response to the beauty and dignity of the visible world.

The publication rests upon the desire of his associates, to supplement the pictures with whatever remains as a record of his gifts:—obscured as these gifts were, by the circumstances of life, by the last sad circumstance of death in early manhood.

It is with the belief that his place in art, his influence upon painting in California, will, in the future, be perceived as distinctive and important, that these written words are preserved; in deep affection for him, and in trust for that future.



Ar



THE LETTERS

If I have avoided mentioning the hardships and discouragements of my work, yet the hardships are very real; but why detail all I have to do without? Surely the incubus of discouragement—the accumulation of the expressions of despair and defeat, both written and spoken,—is heavy enough upon humanity, without my adding to it.

*Piedmont,
Oct., 1896.*

I have made my choice: from this on the only pleasure I count upon is the pleasure in work, in books, in the open country: and if I have good food, and good clothes upon my back, I will thank God and feel happy.

The hope that sustains me is that my work may some day rank as the work of an honest man, who painted as he saw and felt. Don't think it is all plain sailing; if I did not keep the whip-hand on myself, this problem of the future would ruin the possibilities of the present; and if I do not speak of discouragement, do not think it is because it is easy. I remember always, that littleness of life means littleness of an additional sort in the work: that if one cares for one's work, one cannot be careless about one's life—that the artist who would be sincere in his work, must learn above all else, to be honest with himself.

*On the
Train,
Apr. 15,
1897.* Red plush—lots of cinders—the prairie outside: a man, burdened by the thought that it is Sunday, dismally whistles “Beulah Land.” This prairie country is peculiarly Sunday-like—absolutely without interest or incident. Five hundred miles from St. Louis, Spring begins to show, and while it has a beauty of its own, the character of the landscape is monotonous and the colour very acid, the greens sharp where they show: but the bare trees are of a very delicate purple, accented here and there by almond blossoms of a gentle pink. The country now, for the first time since leaving the San Joaquin Valley, begins to be interesting—lived in.

*New York,
Apr., 1897.* This city is a most wonderful and beautiful place, with noble masses of building, green squares, hazes of purple-grey trees, now flushed with a delicate golden-green—the breaking of Spring.

I have seen the exhibitions; many of these men can paint: many can draw, too: few have anything of importance to say: so these exhibitions are filled with affectations, sometimes well painted, oftener not—with the fantastic and the commonplace. These men love nothing, and their tools only in a half-hearted way. Here and there, like a jewel, one finds a beautiful thing—a panel by Whistler and a canvas by Muhrman. . . .

The Bach fugue is still with me: any one using a feather duster briskly, sets it careering through my head.

I am able to manage the memory of things I have seen well enough, but when I try to hear you, the Bach fugue comes back to me in spasmodic fragments: then the swirl of that other big thing, or the Widor (which I heard twice and refused to hear a third time); it is a very faint memory now, but faint as it is, it comes with great dignity and beauty . . .

*Dynas
Powis,
Wales,
Mar., 1897.*

It is Arthur Atkins who writes: not what he might be; I'm trying hard to accept him and make the best of it, but it takes time. It is the vile artificial conscience he is cursed with, that gives all the trouble: but there is always the comfort that we have only fifty years, at the most, before we get a new start, and it really ought to be great fun. I'm hoping that they will set me to work on the forming planets—making the new landscapes and arranging better colour schemes for the sunsets. *You* will have placed at your command the thunders and the high winds of heaven, to compose as you will;—what fun it will be to go! But like the “Jolly, jolly Mariners,” I say “take back your golden fiddles, and give me paints and oils”—but golden fiddles, with splendidly dressed players in the full evening light—we won't quarrel with that sort of thing!

Last Sunday morning I went to Bristol Cathedral. There was no postlude, and I heard the organ only during the service and at some distance. These great cathedrals have a way of giving every sound a very positive value (just as certain lights give every object a distinct note of colour) so

that if the playing were more or less mechanical, I should, probably, be none the wiser.

There is much that is very beautiful about these lawn-like meadows, covered with primroses and spotted with great elms: the sky is often beautiful, too, in a delicate way, but the line is not the line of the Piedmont country, and the colour as a whole is thin and sharp.

One nice thing about this place is the long quiet evenings, and when they are clear, there comes over everything the most wonderful subdued light, which embraces and transfigures the whole world: and this light fades quietly—about ten o'clock it has gone.

*Penarth,
June, 1897.*

England is much more beautiful now, than when I landed: the green less acid and the long evenings with their golden light, drive me utterly daft. The fields with the grass just being cut, and the wonderful wonderful scents of the pink clover, of the woodbine from the hedges, make me want to shriek aloud—for I cannot paint scents. . . .

All this seeing has encouraged me greatly: I know I see and feel things beautifully enough: what I lack is the power to state it all in a direct way. It will come in time. . . . Heaven only knows what I am! "a blooming cosmopolouse" I suppose: I don't care—I like this roving round the world—it suits me well. I have just finished a fairly large landscape, looking down from the cliffs high above, with just the thin white line of

breakers—quiet and low in colour, with some of the solemnity of the sea. But after all, it is Piedmont I want to paint: every now and then the desire to see it, “sweeps gustily thro’ my soul,” but the whole world is beautiful, and as some one has said, “It is by the grace of God that we are artists.” I leave for Paris in a week: if Paris is more beautiful than this, I shall go off with an intense flash and an explosion. for my enthusiasm has reached the top notch!

Your letter from Inverness, fragrant with the odor of sun-burnt hills, of the sea and wind-blown woods, was hailed with joy on its arrival here, last night. *Paris, July, 1897.*

W. and I had just returned from dinner, and as the sun went down with pomp and purple behind the Louvre, we sat upon the wall over the river, seeing the swirl of the sea from the hills above Tomales Bay. It was a fine letter: for me, full of sights of big landscape and the sea: what shall I tell you, in return? This morning we were at St. Sulpice. On going in from the hard white glare of the street, one is struck and quieted by a pervading opulence: the air is soft and slightly perfumed by the incense. Coloured by it and by the glass, the atmosphere becomes golden, and gold is everywhere—in the air, in the colour of the small organ, and in the altar and the vestments of the priests; the lighted candles strike a lower note of the same colour; and, afar off, one hears the chanting of the choir: beautiful voices

of children and men, like jewels—turquoise and opals of blue, set nobly in gold. Oh! but it is splendid—one sits almost dreaming and thanking God for the gift of ears and eyes. In the midst of the wealth of sound and colour and complete happiness, the great organ crashes out, with a force as irresistible as the sea at Point Bonita! And here words cease to be of use; it is great, too great to say much about: one just listens and wonders. But for you, it might have been years before I heard Widor: the joy I have in great music, makes me very grateful to you.

Aug., 1897. My second volume of "The Lark" reached me a few days ago. How utterly Californian it is and heavens!—how Californian am I!

It is the beginning of great things to be done in California; from such a land, generous and open-handed, a great art should spring. . . .

Did I tell you of the luck I have had here? how my uncle, Mr. Keppel, made over to me his rooms, till the Spring? Such a charming place it is, which for a long time Whistler wanted to get from him.

It is before seven in the morning: I write by the window (which fills a broad low arch) the two sides swinging in. A few feet below, on the sidewalk, the gardeners from the country have their plants; they come in the evening, two or three nights in the week—arrange their stock, and then curl up and go to sleep on the soft edge of the sidewalk (next the river) amongst the stephanotis and

tuberoses—the perfume kindly coming in at my open window, all night long.

I can nearly touch the heads of the passers-by from my window-seat; the river is always beautiful and the trees.

I am as happy as I ever hope to be, these times; all day long, from 9 till 5, I draw from the Greek marbles in the Louvre. Think of it! These long summer days I work amongst the most beautiful things in the great cool galleries! The tourists are more or less of a nuisance, but I don't think of them now—I don't even see them.

Last night, W. K. and I sat in the gardens of the Luxembourg, talked of many things, and saw the great pale moon rise from behind the trees—golden clouds still in the sky, the sun just set, the air full of the scents of flowers and moist lawns. What a thing it is to live and to feel—to know all that is best and beautiful in life—and there is much. It only makes the whole business of life more of a puzzle though—for if we are conscious of what is beautiful, we feel with double force, what is not: but, taking it all round, it's a fine thing to live.

I'm in a queer muddled up condition; this going to England and finding how I have broken away from the husks of religion, of suppression, has made me desire to get away from all that I am unable to see clearly is of service to me: to start afresh, and, through life and work, to arrive at what is essential. I see no other way.

Aug., 1897. Till you come, B., I shall work on from the Greeks and the Japs—long, cool, quiet days in the Louvre: I am as happy as I ever hope to be. And yet it will be with intense eagerness that I shall go south, to try again my luck with the brush—a thing I feel I understand now, as I never have before. Working this little has done me good and largely increased my interest in the technical side of painting. My drawing comes on well, I think; I am trying for construction and beauty of line, swinging things in, in as large a way as possible, aiming at a flowing long line and always thinking of design. I can't imagine how I could have been so blind to the Japanese before: they take me off my feet! What pleases me most is, that all this seeing does not disturb my own outlook. I work from 9 till 5 in the galleries, with an occasional short break for a look at Giorgione's "Fête Champêtre." How the name brings back the fête at Burlingame—than which I have never seen anything more beautiful. It has been a wet Sunday; I have spent the morning writing and reading; now the sky is intense blue, the colour clean and beautiful. The river flows by outside and the trees against the window move briskly in the cool breeze. Life is very good. The vintage is close upon us, as with you; would that you were here. Sometimes I gasp aloud for California, but I'm happy here.

The Valasquez in the National Gallery were stunners, but lacking the exquisite sensitive painting of the Whistler "Mother." It was a healthier sense of painting, a more

robust way of seeing than Whistler's that Valesquez had: but not more beautiful, though, it may be, more splendid. Manet is a corker! What a healthy, out-of-door sort of painting his is! That nude woman and negress in the Luxembourg! there never was more splendid painting—never such joy in the manipulation of tools. It was this love of paints and brushes that drove him to expression, not the beauty of life; I would not call him an artist, but to painters and all who have the painter's instinct, Manet must ever be a god. The Greek marbles! the Japanese things! Holy smoke! *they* understood arrangement! I'm going to have an easel in the Louvre and draw just like dam crazy, till you get here!

Of the men of 1830, they are poorly represented: one lovely Corot; two, not altogether lovely; a nice Rousseau, as you know: "The Gleaners" of Millet—but what a disappointing business these minor men are! Millet's colour and technique are rank—but it's great work, all the same. I feel as I compare the Chevannés decoration with the broken fresco by Botticelli, that C.'s colour sense is not a great one and that his sense of painting is nil; but you bet he knows what decoration is. But these same things of Botticelli's—!

I was never so happy in my work, never so sure of its being worth while, as since I got here. This is my programme: a thorough study of the Greeks, of the Japanese, of Giorgione, of Whistler (for painting)—the two first, mainly. I'm going to get solid with the marbles, the Japanese and the old Italians.

My head and eyes are straightening out, after my accident, and pretty nearly time, too.

I am not doing the orthodox things in the Louvre: I go around and find the beautiful things, like those joyous ladies with tambourines and cymbals, on the great vases, and try to get their joy "into my stomach" (as K. does with nature). This afternoon I spent making a drawing from a water colour by Masanobu, such a swishingly swell arrangement. Golly! how these great Japanese knew! There is a giant thing of the sea, fine in colour, by Hokousai—an arrangement by Outamaro, the back of a woman's head, the hair black, and a child. Gosh!! Then a beautiful, beautiful composition by Kiyonaga, three girls on a balcony, with the sea beyond. What artists they were!

I have now no doubt about my own work: it is just a matter of time till I get my brush thoroughly under control; I shall do landscape at least of a pretty decent kind—and it's bigger things than that I'm aiming at. . . .

If I had a wish, what do you think I would wish for? Nothing less than the physique of Miss ——; what work one could get through if one was built that way.

When I get back, I'm going off to the wilds at once: I think I shall try to get a room over at Point Bonita, up in the old lighthouse, and work like mad. I'm making hay now, but just about a year ahead I always see a quiet strip of life, where there are no physical disturbances and no interruptions: the sort of life led by Marius after the death of

Flavian. But this strip of fair water ought to be within reach of my bark now, if it is ever to be, and sometimes I feel that I am there, as I work through the long, quiet days in the Louvre. I know, two years hence, I shall have no doubt about my having been entirely happy in Paris.

I suppose it is just part of the game, and, until we can live quite simply and unconsciously, the great happiness of our lives must seem always to be somewhere in the future.

This painting pictures to suit a low-minded public! These painters are as clever as the dickens, but what is cleverness good for but the picking of pockets?

Vienne

About our walk. We left Paris by train for Vernon, a village midway between this and Rouen. We wanted to hear Vienne "open the organ," if that's the right way to put it, at the church of Notre Dame de Bonsecours (a gingerbread and tinsel construction on the outskirts of Rouen), so we started an hour after the service at St. Sulpice.

It was good to see the open country again, after all the weeks in the city: and such a beautiful country, this north of France, is. The walk from Vernon, through an open, moonlit valley to Presagny, was a thing to stay with one forever: the air was sharp, the road hard under foot and the landscape spread, great and simple, in the dim yet clear light of the moon—the river, here and there, showing beneath us, for we were rather higher than the floor of the valley.

At Presagny, we found all we could wish for, and the pleasure of waking next morning with the singing of birds in the apple trees—the clear, cold September air—all within reach of the senses, was great.

After breakfast we struck out briskly; the hour was early and the air keen, the sky clear and blue. All this French country is beautiful: the one thing I most noted in it, was a certain elegance which even the most dilapidated and humble villages retain. All places spoke of care and love: the people themselves seeming simple and good, taking life as it comes, without complaint and without question. One sees plainly what it was that made Millet paint "The Man with the Hoe," for in all of the faces (perhaps more in the women than in the men) there is a terrible sternness, as if life were but one long struggle; whenever one looks at the soil upon which they live, there is little doubt about the struggle. The strange thing is, that in the midst of the strife and stress, they still take thought and give the time to do things carefully, for the sake of their children and their children's children. It is this that makes the French life beautiful; no conscious reaching after "the beauty that has come in again," but just a great reverence for the home and the land where they and their fathers were born. The beauty that springs from this, is quite apart from "the maid and the violet-shade"—and it is healthy and sweet.

Vienne's playing was great, and one thing took me back bodily, to the church in Oakland. Vienne is charming, quite different

from Widor—the latter being iron all through, appearing to have complete control of every faculty and utterly apart from the world at large; Vienne is the sort of man to make a good friend, very fine and sympathetic in construction, I imagine. Both men strike one as being entirely wrapped up in their work and, like most true artists, simple and generous where their art is concerned.

Yesterday morning I went up to the Luxembourg: I saw with fresh pleasure the big Manet and the Whistler. There is a great quantity of rubbish in the gallery, but one always comes back with new joy to these two men. W. came, and we walked down to St. Sulpice, a short walk, through the sharp air. How I love this clear, cold weather that we have had lately—one could not have better weather for work: the sky blue, the trees a golden purple, still holding some leaves: and men and women, here and there, selling violets, which I never can resist—they so take me back to Piedmont. At St. Sulpice, the Archbishop of London was bossing the show, and they were to sing Widor's mass for two organs. It was out of sight! I wish you might have heard it and the thing he played, the first movement from the Sixth. They have the full choir now, and what a joy it is to listen!

I have read "Tess." The realism of the whole thing leaves one seared and in misery, that such things are real; that such injustice is possible, is almost beyond conception. It

seems to me that it was Hardy's keen sense of this injustice that drove him to writing this book: to me, it will always be great on account of the force with which he has stated his indignation at a state of affairs for which both men and women are responsible. Bierce, on the other hand, writes without any such end as Hardy uses realism for. B. seems a man devoid of the sense of beauty; devoid of creative force, but with a marvelous sense of words and an analytical power that is satirical and morbid.

My eyes are better, but not what I would wish; my headaches have taken wing and my spirits are well back.

And now I am, at last, looking out for —. How glad I shall be to see him, I can't realize, myself. To have a few friends such as he is, would be reward enough for having lived, if one were to fail of all else.

I am staying with W. He is very kind; a fine fellow down to the soles of his feet.

Will you remember me to your mother? I think of her sometimes as I saw her that last night. Whistler is the only living man who could have painted her. He seems to me, more and more, one of the greatest artists, and perhaps the greatest *painter*, I know.

Nov., 1897. This little room of W.'s is very pleasant: all tidy, with a bright fire, and I am sitting up in the neat little soldier bed, writing on that painting of mine, the one of the big hill and the eucalyptus tree and the little houses and the stream in the foreground—the motive

that came from behind your house. Just at present things are more convenient here than at my house, where the workmen are, still. We moved back, when, for no reason that I can trace, I caught cold. We decided it would be better for me over here. The last time I had a cold was at the end of December last year; and I lay looking on the hills, away up beyond the Requa house. My own hills! How glad I shall be to get back; but I must learn to draw first. During the past fortnight I have been working at Carlarossi's: and as it is scarcely light when I rise in the morning, there is not much time to write, for I am resting my eyes in the evening, after the long day's drawing. I have had bad luck since I have been in Paris, but I said all along I wouldn't growl if they would leave me my eyes.

It has been a good fortnight; spent within dirty green walls, covered with the scrapings of many palettes, with clever and stupid drawings, and in company of so many good-natured and otherwise, amongst the crowd calling themselves "art students"—students so far from beautiful in themselves, that one wonders what their works will be.

I have just read "Vain Fortune," by George Moore: another of the kind I don't care for; just a handful of unhappy lives, held up for inspection—a book devoid of anything beautiful, it seems to me. . . .

You say that, after all, it is the composer and creator who have the good time; but I am convinced that the only real and enduring happiness comes from the consciousness that

we are of use—and that we are giving pleasure. I have been feeling this more clearly of late, on account of a little thing that happened not so long ago. W. and I, in a condition of concentrated blues, had gone for a walk to the top of Montmartre. The day was grey and life looked empty enough to me; I had been twice to the oculist and, as Huck Finn said of his prayers, “Nuthin’ come of it.” It began to drizzle, after that to rain steadily, so on our way back we took refuge in the Church of La Trinitie. Here, in the gloom of the autumn evening, they were preparing for a funeral: the big church, all hung in black, was very dark, and, between one thing and another, I put in some good solid wishes that it was *my* funeral.

In the midst of this, a tottering old woman asked me to help her down the steps upon which we stood, and all I regretted was that there were so few steps, for I felt entirely happy for some time—for some days after:—and later, talking about selfishness and unhappiness with W. K., I mentioned this incident, and he said at the time he had envied me very much.

I say to myself: “The architect, the doctor, are really of use in the world”—and then I recall certain little paintings of Corot’s, not much bigger than one’s hand, that have made the world more beautiful; certain little verses that have done as much for me, and the bigger things that you and W. have played—and so I am content and happy to go on and, if necessary, do nothing more than paint



THE VALLEY : PIEDMONT
1895

little pictures. In this day of realism, we who feel the beauty of life, are just as necessary as the physician or the architect or the teacher. We, as surely, are provided to keep the life of the world sweet. All this is fine to think of and helps to keep one happy in one's work. I remember well our talking on this subject, as we came home, after that walk which I enjoyed so much. Heavens! how fine it is to be out of doors, and how much more we are ourselves there than in drawing-rooms.

I can't tell you of the beauty of Paris, now, for all that I feel it so keenly. The gardens, as I go to or come from the class, will always remain clear and distinct in my memory: the bare trees, purple against the full golden blue of the evening sky—here and there a few radiant leaves,—the ample green of the lawns, the swing of the gravel walks and all the world, poor and rich, rejoicing in the good weather; and fat, fluffy pigeons coming with condescension to be fed, while the blackbirds and the thrushes in the tops of the horse-chestnuts whistle, and the ducks make a great quacking and flapping in their little ponds.

I have the first volume of the Book of Isaiah, in the new, readable form. It is so fine, so grand. I must have them all, and the Gospels; for in spite of Rev. ——— and Rev. ——— and many of their kind, I can still feel that happiness is only to be had by following the essence of the teaching of Christ. I don't think I shall ever care to go to church again, however . . .

Thank you for the pens. They came safe, all but one, and it, poor thing, had its beak crossed; it reminded me of a chicken I once owned. Owing to the crossing of its beak, its breath came and went in a ponderous fashion. It was called "Breather."

I have been having such a good time, lately, at the life class; but the drawing is fearfully hard work. Still, I am going to stay with it till it comes. I must, for once I can draw I shall do really big landscape and heaven only knows what else. It excites me always to think of what is ahead, once I can draw with freedom. I want to be a *workman*, pure and simple; at present I am a labourer. With just a month or two's painting (for vacation) I want to spend the next three or four years studying form, and if I don't get somewhere it won't be my fault.

It is Sunday again. The afternoon is warm and summer-like, the sky blue and the houses stand golden through the trees, with simple shadows, the river reflecting it all, with here and there a break of blue or gold upon its surface; then the bare trees just outside my window—and you see it all. It is very beautiful, and a thing likely to hang in my mind for many a year.

Villefranche
sur Mer,
Dec., 1897.

At last I have escaped from Paris, and it was high time, for somehow or other, Paris and I don't get on well together. . . .

It is grey today, and my thermometer is low, as usual. Yesterday the sun was warm and the air smelled faintly of Spring flowers,



PINES: ST. HOSPICE
1897

of which there are many. It is very good to be out of doors, once again. It is not the most paintable country one could imagine: on my left, as I write, are the Alps; on my right, the Mediterranean, which stretches to the horizon: and yet it is not as beautiful as the country north of the Cliff House—rather, it's not so paintable. . . .

Today, it rains in torrents and I have just finished washing my brushes, after a good morning's painting. I can feel it coming! I know now I've gone ahead lots, since I left home. But I am at present awfully lonely; just as soon as I get down to hard work I shall be quite happy and B. has promised to come down for a while. I was a goose to come without a passport—fortifications and soldiers everywhere and to stumble into the error of sketching these government works, would mean being "run in" for a spy. As it is, I am a marked man, for I have been "shooed off" the government ground twice by sentinels, and have been seen prowling round fortresses for miles into the Alps. My red hair and blue sweater and little Chinese blouse, are distinctive, to say nothing of always having a sketch-book or paints along. So who knows. I may be taken and shot!

Death seems peculiarly repulsive, here in France. In this strange little town, I beheld in the drizzle, yesterday, a bedraggled funeral procession, composed of dirty little Italian girls, a wooden crucifix in the front, after it a chanting priest in dirty linen, a boy with a candle, and then a number of small girls, carrying a little coffin. It was dismal in the

extreme and I pray that it may be my lot to die in California, and amongst friends.

I have read "The Well Beloved" by Hardy, lately: not so desperately serious as "Tess," it interested me greatly on account of its bearing on the question of the artist's marrying. It was the misfortune of this hero, to be constantly falling head over heels into the depths of love, and then, inevitably, he would find at the climax, that his "well beloved" had flitted, and he was left with a lady on his hands.

The true artist, it seems to me, is born (whether for good or ill) with the one desire before which all else falls away and becomes secondary. This desire is to grasp the perfect, which always seems to be just around the corner. In a wild-goose chase of this kind, I am as good as sure, that marriage must be only a complication: for if the chase goes on, the one who is not the artist (man or woman) suffers, and if the chase ceases, discontent must come of it, to the artist—and one will say to the other "Look at all I have given up for you!" You understand when I say "artist," I mean the "genu-ine article." I may be all wrong in this.

St. Jean,
Jan., 1898. We left Villefranche yesterday, in a whirl of wind and rain, for this little village farther along the coast toward Monte Carlo.

It is a clean, gusty morning: the sea, all blue and green and broken with white surf, stretches away from below the window, to meet the grey sky, which the sun breaks in a

sort of petulant way. To the left, the cliffs of Monaco rise with a solemn dignity and splendour. They bring back with vividness and pleasure, the coast cliffs of Marin County: but they lack the great beauty of line that pervades the Californian hills and they are also less human. B. arrived on Christmas eve, and we spent a happy day, loafing about the very beautiful town of Nice. Such a colour as the town has, all rose and gold and a great expanse of sea.

I have at last begun to do things: up to this I have been shaking the dust of the schools from off my feet. Nevertheless, injurious as the schools are, I intend to work the next two years in the life-class in San Francisco; but I am going to model and draw with the brush, rather than with the point, for all my instinct is for the former tool and I will get what I want sooner, that way.

I am working upon a canvas: a line of snow-capped Alps against the gold-blue sky of evening; this line comes close to the top of the canvas: then a spot of gold light on the lower range of hills in shadow: below this, one great blue shadow fills the valley and falls to a low line of grass-covered foreground, from which two or three slight, wind-blown pines rise from either side, into the golden sunlight.

There is an old salon man of sixty, at work down here; strong as an ox and much more vulgar, but very amusing. Evidently, he is one of the acknowledged men, has exhibited at the salon for forty years and is all be-medaled. I don't care for his work, though it is the kind

that counts, in Paris. He asked me to show him mine, and so I did. It sort of jolted him; nevertheless, when his wife said, "*C'est drole ca!*" she got it in the neck, so to speak: and our landlady, also, for asking, "What the devil is it?" It was funny to hear him defend the canvas.

. . . I did not tell you, though, what has happened since I wrote; how the silver-grey almond trees against the grey-blue sea, have starred themselves with rosy-white until now they are heavy masses of bloom, broken with the silver of the branches and flecked with the green of another Spring. And the birds are returning from some Winter resort of their own, perhaps Africa, which is not so far away. One hears them, now and then of a morning, in the amandiez—flowering outside the window.

Last night, dark and cloudy, we walked along the cliffs of the little peninsula of St. Hospice. The sea, quite black in the darkness, broke very splendidly against the rocks, far below, and the warm wind quietly moved the pines. . . .

I am being urged, before I go back, to show my work in London and New York—but, heavens! I have no intention of doing that, for years to come! To think of that kind of thing, success, reputation, is worse than foolishness and fatal to good work. No, I am a student and must remain one till I graduate by right of technical attainment. My road is clear enough: I know entirely what I want to do, and that is more than most men of my age can say. I am now, too, in the clutch of school influence—no,

not school influence at all—but the persistent study of form has made me see, out of doors, first and last, *form* (which is right enough so long as one does not allow it to disturb one). By much drawing *and* painting I shall come back to my former perception and then too, be master of my tools.

I hope your work goes to your liking: though as you are an artist, it is quite sure not to be doing so: it never does, till we become careless; but it is all fun, of a bitter enough kind sometimes. I, in the dream of open air and the country, in a Paris atelier, told you that once I knew how to draw, it would all be plain sailing and joy. Well, I know now I was wrong, dead wrong. I know now that to do what I want to do, will mean pains and aches of a perpetual kind. But we all choose the pain!

I enjoyed greatly the journey through Italy, from the French Riviera. After the landscape I had tried so hard and vainly to paint, the landscape of Italy sings a new song in my memory. It is as though the parts I love best in California, Piedmont and Marin, had been lived in and tended for many generations, by a race loving the soil and life and caring about all; and I think of it now, the country around Genoa and Padua and Verona, as of the colour of precious stones and of fruit ripened under a full sun.

*Paris,
Feb., 1898.*

We had really very good fun getting to Venice; we took slow trains (and the fastest are slow enough), and at every station we got off

and ran through the town, and then stopped the night in some town of interest. Of all the beautiful things I saw, the front of St. Mark's at Venice, in the late evening sunlight, was the swellest by ever so much.

It is still all a blur—more in my heart than in my head, I think. And the many churches with their full warm colour and lavish old gilding, are all one with the landscape—the sedate and quiet people, still so beautiful.

It has cleared my road for me, and I see quite plainly where I am going. Withal, I come back a much humbler person.

Paris,
March,
1898. Yesterday was *Mi Caremé*, and there was a great to-do on the Boulevards. We were well in it: all afternoon in the thick of the crowd, trying how much confetti we could hold in our eyes and still see. If I close my eyes today, I see things like impressionistic landscapes, made of spots of paper of different bright colors.

There was great excitement on the Boul. Montmartre; it was while the cavalcade passed that a lot of people in the windows and balconies along the route threw oranges and candy and biscuits to the crowd below: they also let down bottles of champagne, which they would keep dangling over the heads of the crowd in a way that excited them wildly. Sooner or later the bottle would be captured by some one endowed by Providence with a long reach. There were others, high up in the buildings, who threw down oranges, and these fitted very quick some heads in the crowd,

clothing the owners in a thin, transparent yellow and a glowing indignation, which manifested itself in eggs,—the spectators in the windows having to retire, as they had notions of their own as to how eggs should be taken.

The cavalcade was gay, in the grey-blue of the Grande Boulevards—the high, piping colour of paper roses and fancy costumes became pearl-like and gentle, *en masse*; the chestnut trees, astir once again with breaking green, were full of long streamers of coloured papers: the roadway and footpaths were ablaze with confetti: and all Paris was out to see it, and like only Parisians, they were wildly gay without any sign of ill temper.

Yes, as you say, the Zola trial was a farce; the Parisian men are N. G.—small, excitable, vicious; but for the French of the Provinces I have a profound admiration. They are a simple, sober, brave people, taking life as they meet it, without complaint. . . .

Here, too, the whole business of the Latin Quarter is so deadly tiresome and such a to-do is made about the very unimportant matter of painting, that one longs for the quiet of home, where, if such things are less understood, they are much healthier.

I hope your work goes to your pleasure; the susceptibility to discouragement is part of the price we pay for the privilege of being artists: but it's worth while and perhaps we are equally susceptible to reaction, from discouragement to hope. At present I feel happy about my work. I have determined to send nothing to the exhibitions for a year or two; there is no hurry and I wonder, every now and

then, whether they are worth while. When I saw the N. Y. exhibitions and realized that they were nothing more than large editions of the Hopkins' show, that the Royal Academy was the same thing, larger still—I began to feel that it all counts nothing. However, it bothers me very little, the matter of showing; what I am glad about is, that I shall have such a fine chance to *do* things.

Paris,
Apr., 1898.

. . . It is strange how differently one regards life when one has a warm sun and a clear sky above one's head: and how out of place the terrible facts of life are, when one encounters them, under such conditions. There is nothing so convincing of the divine rightness of the teaching of Christ, as His fearless regarding of the world and life: it's a wonderful thing, that He should have said the last word, so long ago.

As to "the refining influences of art?"—well, I don't know! I meet too many men here who have subjected themselves to the "refining influences," with no happy result: men who are "refined" (superficially) to the last degree, and nothing can so rouse me to the same pitch of rowdyism and vulgarity, as these same lady-like gentlemen. The fact is that, except to the healthy minded, who see things in fairly true relation, art is a snare and a delusion: Stevenson pointed out that the calling of the artist is to give pleasure, the calling of other men is to *work*—often enough to disagreeable work; so it stands to reason, that unless at the bottom of

his heart the artist be a *man*—of serious mind and with an eye quick to see his responsibility in life, he inevitably becomes what many good women miscall “refined”—and avoid: what the true woman asks for is manliness in men, just as a man detests the masculine qualities in a woman. If any one asked me what kind of a man *I* like, I would say: “The man who knows the world and loves his mother”: that man is not likely to go far wrong. Life is full of pitfalls to the ignorant, and the “sheltered life” is the cause of much unhappiness:—many failures.

. . . I doubt if art turns often the thoughts toward God, except as the mind and heart, perceiving, sees another facet of His great good-will, in having made the world beautiful. In a world where the *imposed* conditions for every creature coming into it, are such as to make him more and more the Materialist, there must be some antidotes for life: and art, it seems to me, is one of them. To the artist it is given to perceive the beauties and the joys of life—as to the teacher is given the grasp upon hidden truths: and these, through the strength of their perceptions are compelled to give their visions to the mass of the workers: workers who have neither the power nor the time to search for themselves.

I have just heard the “Symphonie Pathétique” given by Hans Richter. I am all of a shake still—the theme of the second movement is going through me, and the last!—how it leaves one sobered. It seems to me that he has

April, 1898.

laid bare his soul—a very great soul—and after it the world looks ordinary and smaller, and I am feeling a strange pity for all these creatures around me who sit playing checkers and discussing art—God help them!—discussing art! After today, there is nothing to discuss. I am afraid I can't write a decent letter—this music has put a weight upon me: I feel as though I were doing someone a wrong: just as I feel when someone I care for has told me of some mental pain: as if I had no right to be happy—rather, that for the time being, I feel as if I should cease to exist apart from the sufferer. It seems as if this touch from a great man had told me things, intimate and sacred: although I haven't a remote idea of what they are or what they mean; only, I feel as if, for the moment, I should be alone—forgotten of myself. The ridiculous desire to pray, for the peace of his soul, comes upon me, and I should do it if it didn't come upon me in just that way—his soul is all right!

I tell myself I am a fool to pretend I feel like this:—that it is all pretense: that it really does not touch me. This is the curse of a Puritan ancestry—a Puritan desire to doubt one's self, that God may be glorified. Heaven help *that* kind of a God, and make me simple.

Heavens and earth! picture exhibitions and salons! What worthlessness one finds—the whole business is full of pettiness and desire for recognition. The sight of a drawing by Millet thrills one and makes the rest all weak and worthless. The drawing I think of is a slight sketch of a shepherd-girl seated in a field: and in its presence the greatest men of today

are forgotten. There is something in it that asks one what all the talk one hears here means: what all this scurrying and haste for salons mean. Good Lord, to have done that sketch! to have written a line, with this same great power—that is what we students, if we have conceit enough, might strive for, instead of thinking of the crown of deadly nightshade, with which the world crowns those who pander to it!

It is a most humbling thing to have heard this symphony of Tschaikovsky's: after this, I shall think less (and heaven knows how it has lately dropped from my mind) of any response to my work, except from the few friends I know. Here, even the men who should know and feel, have sold what birth-right they may once have had, for a mention at the salon.

I have no idea yet as to whether I shall go or stay. I don't much care—either will suit me. I enjoy the drawing and think, at the same time, of the irises in flower on the Marin hills and of the larks, whistling amongst the high eucalyptus blossoms. I shall be glad to be there, although life could not be happier than it is: and I thank God that I was here to hear what I heard today.

Last evening, as I came through the gardens of the Luxembourg, in the glow of the pale golden light, a blackbird with his breast against an unfolding gold and pink and pale green chestnut spire, sang his song to the Spring and the new moon: and the silver-grey pigeons sat in the bare trees with their heads to the slight April breeze, like ships at anchor.

In one place, the rhododendrons are bursting, gloriously, into purple and crimson clusters amidst dark green leaves; and the children play differently: an intoxication (that for the most part, I fear only the child Parisian feels) seems to be rife amongst them. It is the birthright of the simple—this joy in the change of the seasons, and especially this change from Winter to Spring.

Is it going to be war? The papers here think so; and here am I, with a love divided between my native and adopted countries, and feeling that the one country I could really fight for is California (hardly a possibility of speculation of that sort becoming necessary, unless all Europe is involved).

We are exulting in the fact that Zola has won his appeal: that he is to have another trial. It is most unexpected.

You ask why I couldn't paint the Riviera country: I guess it was because it didn't hit me hard enough. It was somewhat spectacular—sharp in colour, too. It was the landscape between Genoa and Milan that made me want to paint; however, I shall paint but little till I am back in California. Meantime, the front of St. Mark's alone made the year worth while: now, the symphony today has doubled it: and I have a considerably better understanding of drawing, too, thrown in.

April, 1898. Spring has come, as Stevenson said it would, "bringing birds and flowers," and Paris is as gay and beautiful as it ever will be—all the Boulevards green with newly-broken buds—



THE MARNE: CHARENTON
1898



the distant buildings swim in a violet mist, while great white clouds roll in the deep blue sky.

Meantime the papers talk of war within twenty-four hours, and ardent American students form bands of volunteers and write many letters to the newspapers. There is one of these sitting opposite me as I write, and he "dameth" a great deal for his size. I haven't much use for his kind.

There is a great row here in the club. On the night of *Mi Caremé*, Madame Mai and the girl called Julie, who both attend to the tables (the former having been *conciierge* for years and years before X—— got his finger into the club's affairs)—both, simple, good-hearted country people, and hardly looked upon as servants, were installed in nurse-maid caps at the instigation of X——, against their will and against the wish of many of the simpler members of the club, who foresaw, truly enough, various attempts at running the club "in style." My main contention was that (as Madame Mai used, in the past, to run the restaurant quite independently, taking the risks entirely into her own hands, and always keeping a kind of motherly eye out for the ramshackle set of men and boys who belonged to the club), it was a mean business to see her crowded down to the position of a common, domestic servant.

Well, we took off the caps, covered everything with confetti, and went off with the caps. A meeting of directors was called: and forthwith a notice appeared on the board, noticing the irregularity and threatening any new offender with suspension. We tore down the

notice, took half of it, each, and I promptly put my half into the grand complaint box (newly established).

It seems that this has jolted the manager very hard: and you may hear, next letter, that I have had to submit to the disgrace of being "thrown out."

Since I wrote last, we have heard the "Ninth" Symphony conducted by Hans Richter, at the Colonne concert. It was late at night—we had been dining at C. F.'s, and we just got standing room for this, the last thing on the programme. It was tremendous! The parts that hit me hardest were after the voices (the choir itself being a big one) came against the great orchestra.

We have heard, too, a concert of badly sung songs of Tschaikovsky's—but his "Slavic March" was big in effect, altho' the orchestra (Lamereux) was miserable. The Russian anthem, which keeps pounding and booming through the thing, making the whole very splendid. We heard "Carmen," too, at the Opera Comique. The music was bewitching, and the kissing, as I remarked to W., was handsome. There is, however, something enraging to me about the attenuated movements of actors; and in opera, especially. I become quite crazy during that long duet in Lohengrin, for instance. These two people, singing away in the street, (by no means dressed for the open) and from time to time plunging around corners and across the stage, like cats with disjointed tails: while I wait for business to begin again.

I have been sketching a good deal lately,

down at St. Cloud. B., W. and I had a long walk down there, on Sunday afternoon: through the woods, to Fontenay aux Roses. The woods were carpeted with the beautiful white anemone. We call it the "wind-flower" in England. And the lesser celandine, with its keen, yellow, star-like flower and dark green leaf, so clean and vigorous. The woods were spotted with the beautiful wild white cherry in flower: all young green and white; the black-birds sang everywhere and the new green of the chestnut leaves mingled with the gold of the sheaths, that such a short time ago enclosed them. In a little while the leaves will have become more golden; the splendid pyramid-shaped spikes of blossom will cover the trees, rosy-gold and purple and white: and the nightingales will sing above the quiet river and in those great groves and terraces, that always seem to me so full of classic feeling.

Your letter is very beautiful: full of the most vivid pictures for me: It brings back to my mind the memory of long days I have spent in the hills—days like this, when the rain fell in a fine powder and the ribbons of mist garlanded the eucalyptus tops. *May, 1898.*

I am so glad to hear that you liked that canvas of Muhrman's. I never had a doubt of him: not that I would place him amongst the greatest, by any means, for there have been so few really great. To me he is away ahead of any man painting landscape here. The fact of the matter is, that unless a man be a poet, as Muhrman is, or an interpreter of character,

as Degas is, there is little sense in his painting, for apart from these things, painting is only justified by its relation to architecture. Of course a man without gifts is at liberty to paint for his own amusement, but a life of amusement is hardly the thing to make it worth while to live; one meets men of this kind over here, and all that one can say is, "God help them."

To be worth anything, there must be some sternness in life: we must care: and if we do, we are bound to suffer. I suppose it is this fear of suffering that makes the Parisian what he is: mean, low and selfish. I refer to the man: I still feel that the woman of Paris has splendid and great qualities: but the conditions of life are all against her.

It is noticeable that the men one meets here who have been through the siege and commune are made of altogether different material from the men of my age, who have seen no hardship. And the priests have a distinct line drawn amongst them, too, marking the distinction between the artificial and esthetic life of the town and the simple life of the country—near to the great joys and sorrows of a brave people. And what a fine mark this genuine life of ready response makes upon a man or woman.

Paris is sinking low and all France is tainted with the vice one knows to be rife here. It is a pity that only war or revolution can save them or bring them back, or save that nobility of character that Millet saw in the peasants of his country—for in the country it is not all lost.



THE BASIN : ST. CLOUD
1898



I heard W., two stories below me, the other night, playing upon the club piano: and under his hands this instrument (which I have come since to believe is misunderstood) sang the Tocata from the Fifth, so that I could have sworn it was 'cellos and violins. . . .

The war is a bad business, and it is hard to get at the exact right and wrong of the case. There seems to be a necessity for war, or its equivalent, to give men fibre; there is too great a crowd studying art—too little manliness in men nowadays.

We have had no good weather so far this month—constant rain. But one night, at St. Cloud, I was rewarded by seeing the sun go down, shining upon the blossoming chestnut trees, with a gradual golden bloom and a gloomy wealth of colour, in the great terraced avenues; the whole thing like some stately chant, so beautiful, so full of a living music the colour was—and, oh! as night fell, and the sun sank and the gold left the great trees, with a kind of rhythm, the whole place changed in a magical way. The liquid blue of the clear sky seemed to have neither beginning nor end: and against it the trees stirred in the Spring breeze—the full, wet green of late Spring, in the blue of the rain-washed sky.

And the way the new moon rises there—and the blackbirds call—and the way the silence falls—and is broken by another bird, who answers the echo of his own voice!

I can't describe it, and so far I cannot paint it—so beautiful, so full of an elegance too fine for words or paint. I wonder if you know the

place? One dreams of the concerts, of the fêtes, of days not so long ago, when that elegance which so marks the whole place must have been echoed in the beautifully gowned women—who perhaps danced to the music of orchestras, beneath the great trees of the park, with its lawns and fountains.

As I write, my heart is in the fight around Santiago, which must be in full swing. From time to time I wish I was there, in spite of the fact that I am no fighter, and have no conviction as to the right of it all. However, God speed them and give us an end to it. We had news of the fighting last night: vague news, and I woke at half past four this morning and thought of it all till I had to turn out, in the hope of further information. It was too early to find papers, so I hung around till Notre Dame opened, at six. The hour I spent there, in the grey quiet, was more to my liking than all the church-going I have done put together.

Later, I got the N. Y. Herald and read the long account through a blur, with shivers in my bones: and thanked God that the men behaved so splendidly. (That dragging of God's name into the business sounds queer, and lands me in complications I do not undertake to grapple with.) All the same, bravery moves me as almost nothing else does, and the Americans are behaving in a fine way.

If I ever go a-soldiering, it will be about something I am quite convinced is worth my life: only, I would pray that I might be hit plump with a bullet where I live, or blown up with a shell—for I have horrors of outpost

duty in the night, with Death crawling in the brush and yellow pestilence hovering in the silence overhead. The darkness falling, even upon country I know and love, fills me with inconceivable terrors, which in moments of credulity have scattered me in all directions and taken in tucks in my face and scalp, leaving me feeling contracted for hours. All of which leads me to conclude that I have about struck step with my destiny, in the somewhat childish calling of a painter.

I wish I were home for many reasons: but all the same, we have a splendid time. We loathe the Parisians now, to our hearts content, or rather discontent. We fight on the street with *cochers* who beat their horses and with the brutes who drive the great patient dray-horses that haul the quarried stone from the *quais*. Yesterday we put in a full afternoon of this rowdy work. We had a row with two carters: in the first we gained our point and compelled the man to get another horse; in this we were seconding two French women, who were protesting when we arrived. As we were seeing this through, another team was being lashed up the hill, in a perfectly vile way, and we left the first for the second scene of action. We settled him, too. No sooner had we reached the river, when we saw a man lashing three horses attached to a load of great blocks of stone, in a way that made us crazy and we roared at him in unison. The crowd was altogether against us, but by our interference the man was compelled to stop whipping the horses and in consequence he was unable to force the tired creatures up the hill; so

hurriedly he unhitched them, and with the mob following, calling us "*Sale Etrangers*," we reached a policeman. Everyone swore we must be arrested, so we were, and were taken across the city to the police station. And here a curious thing happened. Escorted by the policeman, the carter and his three horses and a huge mob, we fell, at the station, right into the arms of a little man we used to sit at table with and who had told us, as we joked, that if we got into trouble to let him know, as he was connected with the police. And now he received us with every manifestation of affection, rising in his majesty and saying, "*Bon jour, Monsieur Artoor.*" *Bon jour, Monsieur Keen.*" The crowd helped the carter to make a case against us, but after leaving our names and addresses, we were allowed to go.

Animals and women in Paris are regarded alike: they have no feelings: "their first duty is to work" (as a damnable little Frenchman said to us the other day). Thank Heaven! I leave soon. Paris is become a nightmare! The Dreyfus case and Zola: the way the police side with the mob: the terrible way the beasts of men treat the women: I have absolutely no good thing left to say of the Parisians I see about me every day. I think my early letters to you showed rather a prejudice in their favour: there is none of that left now. They are in a wretched state: it is useless to look to them for great art or great anything else. We do not judge them hastily or superficially—we have lived a year amongst them now, not as most students, but amongst the French themselves.

With my charming relatives here, Paris is another place. We were all down at St. Cloud yesterday: I never knew the place more beautiful. If only I could have painted what I wanted there! But it was no go: I couldn't work it at all.

From this on there will be a scurrying to get good-byes said and things packed up. I shall be very happy to find myself upon the train at New York: then I shall begin to feel as if I were really getting home. I can't tell you how good it is to think of: I feel as if I could ask no better place to spend my life than in Piedmont and the neighborhood.

I am back in Wales, and the last days have been very pleasant: I escaped from Paris with joy in my heart and apart from a few people, the river in Summer-evening light and the gardens in the cool of the morning—I regret nothing. *Penarth, Aug., 1898.*

Penarth is as beautiful as before. I go down to the water every morning and swim with the two boys. I shall do a good deal of work here, I expect, during the month, so you will be able to get some idea of the place when I return. My Father is pleased with my work, which is a great pleasure to me. About your work? How does it "march"? I used to talk about going off to the wilds and working alone, but lately I have changed my mind. I don't want to be a freak and I don't want to miss any of your recitals. From this on, there is no more St. Sulpice for me: Widor and Vienne are behind: ahead, for a month, is a

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little Wesleyan chapel with a little cracked organ—!

Aren't you very glad the war is over? All the misery it has caused! I hope I may reach home before the men begin to return: I should like to share the enthusiasm, the realization of what the men have faced and suffered.

I am looking forward, now, to starting within ten days. You can't think of the joy getting back will mean or how glad I shall be to be home again and down to work for life. The boys are the best fun in the world—you aren't the only one that has a cinch on families! Yet what an awfully queer business the family problem is? Outside one's home, no one tells one of one's small failings, while inside, one hears little else. Perhaps, though, one does not *hear*, but one realizes them so clearly and so constantly that life becomes almost a burden, and the people one loves most in the world are really the most trying—and the sons and daughters go off and marry, and the whole business begins again! Meantime, I'm having the best kind of a time, here at home. My people tell me I have grown beautifully tolerant. What do you think of that—hein?

But it is good to come back to one's own family with enthusiasm: to feel that the ties of blood are not all that binds one to it. My mother is the same sweet, beautiful woman, whom it will be hard to leave—the more so now that my brother D. has determined to return with me. For him I am glad and it will be a pleasure to me to have his company: but of the family, three of the sons will be in Cali-

fornia, one in another part of England, and one, with endowments that promised much, is but a name and a memory to us. And the dear mother goes about the house, in the same quiet way. If I speak of the greater prospects and the better climate, she smiles and says, "Yes, he will be happy there," and stands at the window, hardly listening, looking far away, over the roads and the treetops to the sea: but with tears in her eyes, that hurt more than anything I know.

This is just to thank you for the note: I liked the things you enclosed.

I was "up" for an hour or so, yesterday, but so weak that it didn't take very long to stop the experiment.

It's all no go. How am I ever to learn my craft? There is nothing but obstacles, all the time.

I wish you the best of luck for tomorrow!

. . . Please don't trouble to send up to enquire for me. . . . I think I shall get steadily better, from this on. . . .

*Piedmont,
California,
Dec. 2,
1898.*



God help me to try hard for gentleness and cheerfulness; digging a way out of this slough of superficial religion. . . .

God let me but keep kind.



ON PAINTING



ON PAINTING

Today, when every town has two or more exhibitions of pictures in the year, all alike are “artists”; the young woman who bespeckles porcelain with forget-me-nots and the young man, returned from abroad, having learned that equal parts of the primary colours added to four times the quantity of flake white, when stirred briskly for some seconds and applied with a fork to an absorbent canvas, result in a picture of “the rather impressionistic kind”—is it strange that intelligent people are constantly asking what ‘painting’ really is? *Paris,*
Aug., 1897.

In France one sees many brilliantly clever things, which, as far as *painting* is concerned, might have been done with a tooth-brush or the finger nail. In England, one finds everything, from “Mary and her lamb” to abstruse extracts from Bulfinch, all with explanatory poems attached to the frames; the work done with fine brushes and the surface licked while drying, in order to attain “that ’igh finish of a photograph,” so pleasing to the clergy.

In America the exhibitions are distinguished by a preponderance of mermaids and picket fences.

Under such circumstances is the public to be blamed for its ignorance of what the painters art really is?

In the Luxembourg gallery in Paris there hang two modern canvases, which tell us what *painting* is, in clearest terms.

One, by Edouard Manet, a picture of a nude woman reclining upon the linen of a low bed, will forever be ranked by painters as painting of a great kind. In this we see that joy in the manipulation of brushes, in the handling of paint, that is the distinguishing mark of the painter; a man lacking this joy in the expressiveness of his materials may be a poet, an observer, or an experimentalist: but never a painter. In Manet, the painter's instinct was of the most robust quality: what he had to say he said clearly: every time he put his brush to canvas, he did so deliberately: each stroke expresses the *painter* and explains itself. Let any intelligent observer compare this canvas of his with those hanging near it, and he must at once see the difference between *painting* and what are merely drawings coloured.

The second canvas is that by Mr. Whistler, the now famous "Portrait of the artist's mother." In this we find a more sensitive kind of painting than that of Manet: an exquisite appreciation of what can be done with the brush. Apart from the distinction of the arrangement and colour, this canvas gives us an example of *painting* in the highest meaning of the word. It is the work, not only of a great *painter*, but of a great artist as well. A man's place as a painter is decided not by *what* he paints, but *how* he paints it. What he has to say is, finally of course, of greater importance to us than his manner. His choice of subject will reveal to us how much of an artist he is, how far he understands the limitations of his art: but at this present moment that deeper question need not concern us.



CHARENTON
1898

ON PICTURES

The colour is beautiful and clear: the painting very thin, the canvas fine and hardly counting at all. It looks to me as though the work were carried over a long time and constantly let harden. This man paints in a beautiful delicate way. The shadows are painted very thin and wet.

*Corot,
"Souv.
d'Italie."*

A beautiful composition, very strongly modelled, with a much better feeling for the brush than in his larger things—and while the colour is not great, yet it is simple and clean.

*Millet,
"Les
Baingneuses."*

A beautiful Spring-like thing—the painting very thin and quiet. He pays great attention to detail, without losing breadth: the painting is beautiful: there is no hesitation in the brushing.

Daubigny.

Most disappointing. In black and white, it has always delighted me: here, the colour is bad and the painting also, but the arrangement and feeling are great.

*Millet,
"The
Gleaners."*

A wonderful French evening light, full of poetry and yet very real. The colour is beautiful: the composition fine and serene—the can-

*Rousseau,
"Sortie de
Foret."*

was nowhere loaded and yet it might be cleaner brushing. Not what I would call great painting: it is rather a draughtman's painting than a painter's. Great painting should be expressive in every stroke: there should be no indecisive strokes and the brush should be felt everywhere.

Kiyonaga,
 "The
Balcony." Three women, on the one summer's evening of the world—on a rose-white enamel balcony, far above the pale, gold-green summer sea, which the sky meets, with a suggestion of silver violet-grey. Upon the sea are boats which the one woman watches, as she toys with something she holds in her hands. Her gown is rosier than the water, but very slightly. She wears a great black sash. The woman standing in conversation with the one who is kneeling is dressed in a rose-gold gown—the latter in black. The blind, hanging into the upper corner of the picture, is green, and the hair of each of the women is black.

One of the most beautiful things in the Louvre, to me, is the figure of a woman upon an earthen helmet from Canosa. Tall and dreamlike, beautiful in line, she carries herself, her shield and sword, with an exquisite grace; the swirl of drapery, her forward motion and nodding plume, are rendered in a perfect way: and the rise and fall of the slight relief, ravish one.

There is no need for realism in painting beyond a genuine impulse received from Nature: colour and drawing one has entire liberty to subject to the one end of expression.

*Paris,
May, 1898.*

What makes a great picture is not brilliancy of handling, or the complete rendering of surfaces, but the seizing and holding of some element of that divine beauty which all things possess in some degree. And the mark of any great work of art—whether it be a print of Kiyonaga's, the "Concert Champêtre" of Giorgione, or a Bach fugue,—is this: that it is for all time and belonging to none: stamped with the mark of infinity.

The "Infante" and the "Assyrian Sphinx"—even slighter great things, some of Corot's landscapes, possess this power to carry us, beyond time and place, into what, in one's happiest dreams, one fashions eternity.

If the painting of surfaces were the great thing, we should count Manet a great artist for his "Olymphe," which is painting carried to the last point the craftsman alone can carry it; had the artist in him been more pronounced, he would have stood amongst the greatest. But that the artist comes before the craftsman, no one will deny; the "Concert" of Giorgione in the Louvre, in spite of the fact that in a painter's sense it is not painted, still, like a beautiful dream, brings tears to one's eyes, while in the presence of the "Olymphe" one only wonders at the glory of the painting and the realism of the canvas. If it is a beautiful thing, it is because the woman's firm and supple body was a beautiful thing in itself—was squarely seen and wonderfully

painted: a process in which the painter never forgot his model.

In all the canvases by Henry Muhrman, in greater or less degree, is the distinguishing mark of a great art: a mark one looks for with such dearth of reward amongst the myriad works of alleged artists shown at the Paris and London exhibitions.

Now the God-given gift of *seeing* is sent not to the many and not to the few: somewhere between the many and the few the limit of this company lies; but the power to see, *with* the power to *express*—ah! how rare is the man with the two gifts! He stands second only to the great architect or the great composer, who, by instinct, deal as freely with advanced mathematics as with the abstractly beautiful. But it is a futile thing—this comparison between the arts: if a man has seen and rendered beauty, let us acknowledge him: his rank, the years alone can decide. For us the landscapes of Henry Muhrman reveal these two gifts of seeing and expressing. . . . [Unfinished.]

ON LANDSCAPE

ON LANDSCAPE

The wind is north: the overhead sun floods the landscape with a hard and glaring light: the blue sky seems, like the sun and wind, to lack mercy. Everything suffers: the hills look parched and careworn: the grass, that so lately brought the joy and hope of Spring to the hearts of men slowly yields up its life. The roads lie white and dusty, the ring and hardness gone from them: no invitation have they for the traveller.

*Piedmont,
1895.*

A group of eucalyptus trees stand silently bearing the unmerciful light, yet everything waits in hope: and as the sun slowly sinks, all changes. The landscape sings with colour, as a gem: the distant hills are suffused with purple and gold: their careworn look of noon vanishes, and in its place, great solemnness and contentment—broad lights and noble shadow. The grass, almost golden, holding still a lingering note of green, blazes now in the rich light: here and there long shadows steal over it, giving peace. The trees, rejoicing in a wealth of colour, are of green with gold in the green and a broken vibrant violet in the shadows, and opulent gold upon trunks and branches.

The great quiet landscape smiles; and I, coming wearily home over the hill, conscious of my own littleness (though doubtless beautiful, too, in the coloured light), smile and thank God fervently, that He did not make the landscape grey.

1897. A glowing July afternoon on the Seine, between Paris and St. Cloud—men, loading stone on a great barge, stripped to the waist, the skin a golden-rose colour, quite low in tone, against the water, blue, very deep.

While out of doors, I see colour high: but I *think* in low, rich colour.

*Villefranche,
Jan., 1898.*

Terraces upon terraces, and as far as the eye travels are the domes of silver-green olives—then, far up, a great rosy and blue cliff.

In the beds on the terraces, beneath the olive trees, are Spring flowers which scent the air, warmed now, by the growing sun of the New Year. The sky is Californian blue: below me lies the harbour, where rides the U. S. S. "San Francisco," with many little empty boats around it. A wisp of mist lies close upon the horizon, but not a cloud in the sky.

*Piedmont,
Italy,
Feb., 1898.*

Vineyarded hills high in a blue sky, with golden houses and grey roofs. The hills are broken by the first Spring green, crocuses and blossoming almonds.

Cariati. Terraced almond orchards and the trees in full blossom—grey hills back of them: and the grey-green sea, coming to purple toward the horizon—silver-grey houses and church-towers.

Genoa. Golden and rosy, with the sea a grey-blue dream; and beyond, the blue sky with snow-



PENARTH PIER
1898

capped Alps—faint and vanishing; churches, with torrents of full colour and gold—the colour of fruit ripened under a warm sun. The curtain over a church window, full of the reds of fruit and wine and gold—and the market place—colour again.

Town desolate—children with wooden sandals—a beautiful Wintry-Spring landscape, human and clean; a landscape gentle, and worked by man: coloured with gold and gold-green. The yellow rosiness of the bare willows, touched with violet—everywhere houses of old gold brick and of stucco, with hospitable arches for cattle and crops—all taking the light in a simple way—with dignity: everywhere colour, full colour, living, but old and warm. *Montaro.*

A town of beautiful and sedate buildings, bare trees, and subdued green of Winter grass; a brisk river, with golden houses and blue shadows—a great deal of rose-coloured marble. Missed our train, so lunched and slept on the grass. The sun begins to get warm and the chestnut buds are becoming sticky. A swell market-place—big white umbrellas and people with their wares below—the whole square full of beautiful colour and buildings—a town compact and of great dignity—people and buildings, all beautiful. Squares with hosts of tame, hungry pigeons. Later, crossed the town and sat on a pile of stones by the roadside, till the train was due, looking over a pleasant green, with bare trees, soldiers drilling and

resting: a few children playing; the houses beyond the trees, white and golden stucco.

On the way to Padua—a beautiful, level country with vines and mulberry trees—newly turned, golden brown earth, the new green showing in the grain fields and some grass fields all starred with a pale purple crocus: in the distance low hills, vibrating in sunshine and beyond these, hills with snow.

Venice. Arrived by water (steam tramway from Padua). Venice from the boat, a blaze of evening sunlight. St. Marks like a jewel. Saw Gustavo Salvini play "Othello"—an out-of-sight Moor in blue and gold. Place S. Marco, Saturday night, the gas lights lit, a band playing: all the boys and girls masked for carnival and all the town out. St. Marks, glowing with colour and the alarmed pigeons making long and bewildered flight in the gas-lighted night.

Como. A quiet evening sunset—primroses in full bloom and willows with catkins: only two patches of snow on this protected side of the mountains—and at Chiasso a wait of two hours; children doing their best to be gay for the fête season.

Paris,
July, 1898. A long sail down the river to St. Cloud—the sun hot and a cool wind blowing.

The walk up to the basin at the end of the great avenue—heated with my load—smelling every rose along the way, and at the end, sit-

ting upon the bank bestrewn with clover blossoms and watching the great white clouds pass silently over the tops of the great trees. This is life, to me!

. . . Where swallows play between low banks,
And the white clouds hang reflected:
The great white rounded clouds of Summer,
Floating in the powdered blue.
The great, green rounded, heavy trees,
That shimmer down the terraced avenue. . . .

The great trees against the singing blue of the channel—gold-green slopes, with playing children: upon the blue expanse, sails of luminous white, like worn ivory. Far below, the jutting pier, dark against the water—with liquid lights of gold and ruby, melting into the wet sky.

*Penarth,
Aug., 1898.*



THE HILLS : PIEDMONT
1896













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